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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Field Notes

New Jersey Field Office



An activity report of field operations -- April 2000

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From the Supervisor's Chair

By: Clifford G. Day, Supervisor, New Jersey Field Office

The theme of this Field Notes issue is "migratory birds," a federal trust resource responsibility. One of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (Service) priority themes for 2000 is to *lift the conservation of migratory birds to a higher level*.

"Migratory birds" promotes an appropriate conservation theme for New Jersey. The State provides a strategic location for migratory birds and is a critical stopover for millions of neotropical migratory birds, including raptors, waterfowl, waterbirds, and songbirds traveling the Atlantic Coast Flyway. In fact, New Jersey supports the second largest concentration of migratory landbirds in North America. Most of the State's 443 recorded bird species are migratory. Areas important for migratory birds warrant protection, particularly the Hackensack Meadowlands, central Passaic River basin wetlands, Highlands Region, Cape May peninsula, Delaware Bay shoreline, and inland bays and rivers. During a recent tour of the Hackensack Meadowlands, U.S. Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt commented to me about how impressed he was with the wildlife value of this wetland area in the shadow of New York City.

Prior to the Lacey Act of 1900, which prohibits interstate shipment of wildlife killed in violation of state laws, many showy bird populations were depleted to meet fashion industry demand. The Act was a protective milestone in curtailing this carnage, but during the next 100 years wild bird populations continued to decline from habitat loss and degradation, pesticides, environmental contamination, oil spills, competition from invasive exotic species, and new predators.

Coincident with implementing nationwide migratory bird management, the Service protects migratory birds through several mechanisms including habitat restoration, statutory authorities, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and other efforts. Service programs, including *Partners in Flight* and *Partners for Fish and Wildlife*, protect migratory birds via education and habitat restoration, respectively.

Migratory birds cross political and geographic boundaries. Hence, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918) was passed -- the first law incorporating international cooperation in migratory bird conservation. Other legislation, such as the Endangered Species Act (1973) provides additional protection to federally listed species, such as the Piping Plover. The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (1958) enables the Service to review and comment on a variety of regulated activities that could adversely impact migratory bird habitat. Proposed legislation, such as the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, would provide funding to initiate on-the-ground conservation for migratory birds.

The National Wildlife Refuge System provides substantial habitat for wild birds. In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt took the first forward stride in developing our National Wildlife Refuge System by establishing Florida's Pelican Island Bird Preserve. Today, there are more than 515 refuges nationwide. In New Jersey, millions of birds pass through the Wallkill River, Great Swamp, Forsythe, Supawna Meadows and Cape May National Wildlife Refuges during spring and fall migrations.

The Service uses several innovative programs and management plans to sustain and safeguard migratory birds, most notably the federal *Duck Stamp* program. Since 1934, revenues from the sale of Duck Stamps have been used to purchase thousands of acres of habitat. The Service also coordinates the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*, an international effort focused on the protection, restoration, and management of habitat for the migration, wintering, and production of waterfowl and other migratory birds. The Plan's "Joint Ventures" muster stakeholder resources. New Jersey is located within the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Additionally, the *North American Bird Conservation Initiative* (1998) is looking to use existing and create new joint ventures for *conserving all migratory birds, in all habitats, through 'wall to wall' Joint Ventures across the United States*. Furthermore, the *U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan* was initiated in 1996 to develop priority bird strategies and will be completed in 2000. New Jersey is located in the Plan's North Atlantic Shorebird Region. The *North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan*, initiated in 1998, is focused on seabirds, gulls, terns, pelicans, and wading birds.

Americans observe and value migratory birds. Continued public support and enthusiasm for wild birds and the Service's commitment to statutory obligations and mandates, when coupled with the programs and initiatives summarized above, will *lift the conservation of migratory birds to a higher level*.